

The True Witness.

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE,

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MONTREAL, FRIDAY, AUG. 5, 1859.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

By the arrival of the *Persia* we learn that the Peace Conference would meet at Zurich in about a week. It was believed that Sardinia would not be represented. The discontent in Europe at the terms of the peace continued unabated. Emperor Napoleon's explanations were not by any means considered reassuring.

It is affirmed that Sardinia signed nothing but the armistice, and is consequently in a nominal state of war with Austria. Italy continued to exhibit discontent at the terms of peace. It is asserted that neither Victor Emmanuel or any authorised Minister of Sardinia signed the peace of Villa Franca, and that the armistice, ending 15th Aug., leaves Sardinia and Austria at war.

THE BOGUS ABDUCTION CASE.

In our last we contented ourselves with laying before our readers the facts of Miss Starr's "abduction," postponing to another day all discussion upon the merits of the case. As the truth of the facts, as by us published, has not been contested, we may take them for granted; and thence we conclude:—

That the application, by the Protestant press, of the term "Abduction" to the case in question, is to say the least a gross misnomer, or, not to put too fine a point on it, a deliberate falsehood on the part of our Protestant cotemporaries. A young lady, of legal age, and therefore mistress of her person, who, of her own free will, and in spite of the reiterated cautions of her friends, leaves her father's house, cannot be said to have been "abducted," or carried away by those friends. It is only Protestants, who could apply such a term to such an act.

We find however that even the Protestant press—as the facts of the case are being gradually elicited—is inclined to drop the term "abduction," but as it is unwilling to throw away such a good "No-Popery" cry as that which the Miss Starr case has furnished it, it has changed its tactics; altered its bill of indictment against the Catholic clergy; and raised consequently a new issue, which is thus stated by the *Montreal Herald*—one of the most able, but certainly not the most prejudiced, of our Protestant opponents:—

"When Miss Starr applied to the authorities of the Catholic Church for guidance in her religious doubts, they could not, as honest men, have done otherwise than seek by their ablest arguments to fortify her inclinations towards their Church. If they only, while respecting the rights of conscience and their duty to their fellow-being, had also remembered those other duties, which are anterior even to Christianity—the duty of the child to the parent—we should have applauded, rather than blamed them."—*Montreal Herald*, 29th ult. The italics are our own.

From the passage thus italicised, it will be seen that the *Herald*—who in this we believe is a fair exponent of Protestant ethics—asserts that there are "duties which are anterior to Christianity," and that "the duty of the child to the parent" is one, at all events, of those duties or obligations which take precedence of, or are "anterior" to the duties and obligations of Christianity. Of course, if there be any such duties; if the obligations of Christianity are not anterior to all other obligations; and if amongst these obligations to which Christianity must yield precedence, is the obligation or "duty of the child to the parent," then is the conduct of the priest, with whom Miss Starr put herself in communication, highly reprehensible. But if, on the contrary, and as we contend, the obligations of Christianity are anterior to all other obligations; if all other obligations or duties, even "the duty of the child to the parent" must yield, or be postponed, to the higher claims of Christianity; then we contend, the objections of the *Herald* against the Romish ecclesiastic in question are taught; then is the *Herald* bound by its own argument, "to applaud, rather than blame him."

Are then the claims of the parent to the obedience of his child, anterior to the claims of Christianity? or in other words—is the first and highest allegiance of the child due to its earthly parents, or to Christ? This is the whole question at issue betwixt us, and those who in the conduct of Miss Starr, find occasion to blame our Catholic Clergy, and to impugn the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. With its usual acumen the *Herald* has touched upon the main point of the question—that in fact upon which it entirely hinges. Discarding therefore

for the present all minor details, as to whether Miss Starr had a leather valse with her, or a carpet-bag, when she left her father's house, or whether she had on a black, or a dark-blue gown, we shall address ourselves to the consideration of the sole important point at issue:—Are the claims of the parent over the child anterior to the claims of Christianity?

But the claims of Christianity are the claims of Christ; and duties therefore which are anterior to Christianity, are duties which are anterior to duties towards Christ, or in other words, towards God. Resolved therefore into its last expression the thesis of the *Herald* may be, or rather must be, thus expressed. "The duties of the child to the parent are anterior to, and should therefore take precedence of, the duties of the child to God." Let us apply this novel and somewhat startling dogma to a case precisely analogous to that which we are reviewing.

The child of idolatrous parents, is convinced that it is its duty towards Christ, or God, to embrace Christianity, and to renounce offering sacrifices to idols. On the other hand, the parents order the child to burn incense, night and morning, before their favourite image of Mumbo-Jumbo—a large and remarkably ugly wooden divinity with a black coat, a white choker, and a somewhat greasy and inflamed countenance. What, under such circumstances, would be the duty of the child?—should it obey its parents, or its God? are its duties towards its idolatrous father anterior to its duties towards Christianity?

The *Herald* solves the question at once, by asserting that "the duty of the child to the parent is anterior even to Christianity." But the Christian demurs to this; contending that the duties of creature to creature can never be anterior to, or take precedence of, those of creature to Creator; that the duties of the child to its parents are relative and limited; whilst the duties of the child to God, and therefore to Christianity, are absolute and unlimited. He concludes therefore that under the supposed circumstances the child would not only be at liberty, but indeed bound, to disobey its parents; to flee from them if by no other means could it avoid being compelled to worship Mumbo-Jumbo; and thus to treat the claims of Christianity as anterior to the claims of father and of mother. Now this is just all that we assert in regard to Miss Starr.

She, the child of heretical parents, was convinced that her duty towards Christ required her to profess and practice the Catholic religion.—Her parents insisted that she should not; and forced her to take part in heretical worship.—She, therefore, on the same principle as that on which the Christian child of idolatrous parents would be justified in leaving its parents house—was fully justified in fleeing, from the home where she was daily compelled to do mortal sin. If the act of Miss Starr be worthy of blame, then so also would be the precisely similar act of the Christian child of idolatrous parents.

But if the act of Miss Starr in leaving her father's house in which she, being of age and the legal mistress of her own person, was not allowed to practice her religion, be not worthy of blame—then, neither can we logically blame the conduct of the priest or of the nuns who were privy to her scheme of leaving her father's house. In the first place as the secret revealed to them by Miss Starr involved no breach of the moral law—on the hypothesis that the duty of the child to God is anterior to its duty towards its parent—so neither priest nor nun was obliged to divulge it. In the second place, as the secret was confided to the priest, in his character of Minister of Christ, he could not under pain of mortal sin, divulge the secret to any human being. The lawyer, the medical man, is held bound to maintain inviolate the secret divulged to him in his professional capacity; much more then is the present bond, no matter what the consequence, to maintain inviolate the confidence reposed in him by his penitents. From this obligation no law of man, no command even of the Pope himself, could absolve the priest under any conceivable circumstances. In arguing, therefore, that the priest erred in not divulging Miss Starr's intended departure to her father, our Protestant cotemporaries evince themselves to be but slightly acquainted with the obligations of a promise, and altogether ignorant of the obligations of the Catholic priest towards his penitents.

Miss Starr in fine was legally her own mistress, and had the legal right to leave her father's house when, and as she pleased. If, as she represented her case, she was unable to practice her religion under her father's roof, and was compelled to join in acts of heretical worship, it was her duty to fly therefrom at once. And though the priest strongly and frequently impressed upon her mind the great importance of the step she proposed to take, he could not, even to please the *Herald*, recognise that the claims of Christianity must give way to those of the parent over his child. The very head and front of the priests offending bath this extent.

All, therefore, depends upon the truth of the moral proposition laid down by our *Montreal*—

*This was Miss Starr's own story.

temporary. But so monstrous, so revolting is that proposition even to our natural reason, that we doubt if the *Herald* will venture seriously to defend it; and yet if he cannot defend it successfully, he must, by his own admission, allow judgment to go against him; he must applaud instead of condemning the priest who told his penitent that it is better to obey God rather than man; and that Christianity requires of all its votaries that they be ready to renounce father and mother, wife, children, world's goods, and life itself, for Christ's sake. Our cotemporary will, of course, remember that the Romish priest does not make his own theology, and is not, therefore, responsible for its teachings. No doubt, had there been an able editor in Galilee in the days when Our Lord appeared there in the flesh, in a leading article he would have made mince-meat of the sermon on the Mount; and so, no doubt, in like manner the *Herald* will treat very cavalierly the arguments of those who take their theology from such an old-fashioned superannuated authority instead of consulting the last number of the *Times*, or the opinions of the Protestant press and pulpit.

Assuming, therefore, the truth of Miss Starr's statements respecting the domestic persecutions to which, because of her desire to become a Catholic, she was exposed, we contend that she was not only authorised, but bound to seek a shelter elsewhere than in her father's house; the where or precise spot in which she sought that shelter matters not. The action of the priest to whom her secret was confided, was limited to this; 1. that he did not betray that secret to those whom he believed to be intent upon forcing her to apostasy; and 2d. in procuring for her the company and protection of a person of her own sex in order to guard her reputation. Prevarication or deceit on his part there was none; for he was never called upon to speak; and even had he been so called upon, he was bound by the laws of honor, morality, and religion, not to betray the secret committed to him, as to a priest, by a penitent. Let us say one word with respect to the action of the Nuns at Toledo.

These extended their charity to a young person requesting a few days' shelter in their Convent. No restraint was imposed upon her, no concealment attempted. Whilst an inmate of the Asylum, Miss Starr was at liberty to ride about town as she pleased; to visit her Protestant friends; to return or stop away altogether, as she thought fit. There was no romance, no mystery; and her discovery by her father was under such circumstances was the simplest thing imaginable. Hearing that his daughter was at Toledo, he took the cars for Toledo; went to the Convent; found his daughter—not in a sick bed, or in a dangerous state, as falsely asserted by the Protestant press, but in very tolerable health and condition. Indeed the story about the "sickness," the "broken-hearted father," and "wonderful adventures," is but a poor attempt to create a little fictitious interest in the case; to raise a good deal of unnecessary excitement against the hospitable Ladies of Charity, who at her own urgent request, had kindly consented to give a few nights' lodging to a young lady professing the Catholic religion, and expressing a desire to embrace the religious life; and perhaps to furnish Mr. Starr with an excuse for his certainly very rude behaviour towards the Ladies who had been so charitable towards his daughter.

Thus have we gone over the particulars of the case. Abduction there was none; for the young lady being of age left her father's house, of her own free will, and uninstigated thereunto by any living being. Prevarication or deceit on the part of the Catholic Clergy, or Religious, there was none; because the only persons in Montreal cognisant of the young lady's fate were never appealed to, and therefore never said a word about it. Unlawful concealment there was none; because there is no sin in concealing or keeping secret an act which involves no breach of the law of man or the law of God. In justice towards Miss Starr there was none; because from first to last, she was left the absolute mistress of all her actions. Injustice to Miss Starr, her father, there was none; for he had no claims either upon the priest whom his daughter consulted, or on the Nuns who sheltered her. Of what then do Protestants complain? Of this—that we will not accept their passions and prejudices as our rule of conduct; that their crude code of morals, with all its monstrous absurdities, is not accepted as the standard of morality in the Catholic Church; that she teaches that not even the duties of the child towards its parents are anterior to its duties towards Christianity, i.e., the revealed will of God; and above all, because such is their morbid hatred of Popery that so good an opportunity to raise a clamour against Romish priests, and Sister of Charity, as has been presented to them in the case of Miss Starr, cannot be overlooked. In the words of the Conventicle, "Our brethren are improving the occasion."

The name of Mgr. De Charbonnell, Bishop of Toronto, having been by the Protestant press mixed up in this affair, His Lordship has seen fit to address the subjoined communication to the

Toronto *Leader*; and it has subsequently been copied by most of the other Protestant papers in the Province:—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE LEADER.

St. MICHAEL'S, Toronto, July 28, 1859.

Sir.—I thank you for having recommended to the public, in your article of this day, (headed, "The late Romance of the Convent,") to suspend their judgment. The following are my answers to the calumnies concerning myself in Miss Starr's case:

I declare 1st, that I never sent for, nor wrote to Miss Starr in my life; 2nd, that having met her in my house, I blamed her imprudence in coming; 3d, that being acquainted with her desires, I invariably insisted upon her making them known to her parents; 4th, that she has never been admitted in our Church, nor to any sacrament in Toronto; 5th, that I never recommended her to any person, nor wrote or spoke about her to any one living in Montreal; 6th, that I have been altogether a stranger to her leaving that city; 7th, that when she presented herself at my door, on her arrival from Montreal, I refused to see and receive her; 8th, that she was not aided by me even during one hour in her concealment; 9th, that I have not given any indication, false or true, when she was inquired after, because I was not questioned on the matter; 10th, that she never received any direction from me to go east, west, north or south, nor of course to Toledo; 11th, that she never received from me any pecuniary aid, or any promise thereof, for carrying her plans into execution; 12th, that I never received nor intercepted any letter intended for her relatives; 13th, that she had been heard, several times, complaining of my coolness and of my not seconding her designs.

I hope, Mr. Editor, that the above declaration will give satisfaction to your calumniators, as they are quite satisfactory to the conscience of your humble servant,

ARMAND DE CHARBONNELL, Mgr. of Toronto.

P.S.—I trust that any honest Editor, who will have published or will publish the charges against me, will publish also my answer thereto.

As a specimen of the *animus* by which Protestants are actuated in this business, let us add the following *trait*:—

In the first version of the affair, as it appeared in the Protestant press, the Bishop of Montreal was directly accused of falsehood, and of intentionally deceiving Mr. Starr. Hereupon the latter, very honorably, published a letter in the *Commercial Advertiser* completely exonerating the Bishop from this odious imputation, and recognising his frank conduct throughout. This act of bare justice done to a Romish ecclesiastic has infuriated the ultra-Protestant; who of course look upon lying and slandering, not only as legitimate weapons against Rome, but as arms which it is the bounden duty of all sound Protestants to employ in the war against Popery; and thus a writer in the *Montreal Herald* gives vent to this truly Protestant feeling:—

To the Editor of the *Montreal Herald*.

St. Antoine Street, 29th July.

Sir.—The "Nunnery Case" is getting more complicated as it proceeds. At first, there was a large measure of public sympathy for the Starr family; but Mr. Starr, by his injudicious letter in the *Advertiser*, knocked that sympathy, at once and for ever, on the head.

MISS STARR CORRESPONDENCE.—We publish the letters which over the signature of "A Friend of Truth" have appeared in our Protestant cotemporaries, and are evidently written by one who from his peculiar position was, from the beginning, conversant with all the facts of the case. To the unprejudiced, the letters are convincing; upon the Protestant mind generally they will have little effect, for that mind is naturally prejudiced against truth. The silly nonsense of their press indeed cannot but provoke our thorough contempt for their intelligence and good faith. To suit their purposes every law hitherto recognised as imposing obligations upon the Christian and the man of honor, must be repealed; and a new code of morals, fresh from the conventicle, and ratified by that class of evangelical gentry who delight in nasal psalmody on Sundays, and on the other six days of the week, said their say, mix calumny with their coffee, alum in their bread, and beat up the brains of deceased calves in their cream, is now, through the columns of our Protestant cotemporaries, about to be published to the world.

Foremost amongst the articles of this precious code, stands the following—"That it is a sin to keep a secret, that it is dishonorable not to break faith." Hitherto we have been in our ignorance accustomed to look upon the *suppremo veri*, of which the loyalists cognisant of the hiding places of Charles II., after the battle of Worcester—and of another Prince Charles after the disastrous day of Culloden, and when pursued by the rascally Hanoverian blood hounds—were guilty, as an example for honorable men to follow. The *Herald* has, however, undeceived us. According to him, the English loyalists, the gallant Highlanders should have revealed the secret of their princes' hiding places to their pursuers, instead of "baffing" them. Such at least is the logical conclusion from his condemnation of a Catholic priest, for not revealing a secret confided to him in his sacerdotal capacity, and because he did not volunteer to betray the confidence of one who had reposed trust in him. For the interests of humanity it is to be hoped, however, that this new moral code, of which the *Herald* is the exponent, may not find general acceptance.

The following are the letters above referred to; in which the whole facts of the case in so far as the Montreal Clergy are concerned, are fully laid before the public. We commend them to the careful attention of the reader; worthy of his respect not only on account of their intrinsic merits, but because of the position of the writer:—

1ST LETTER.

(To the Editor of the *Montreal Herald*.)

Sir.—In your paper of the 20th July, under the heading—"Startling Case of Abduction—A Young Lady Smuggled into a Convent,"—you have been pleased to publish an article filled with gratuitous insults and calumnies against the Catholic Church and her institutions, as well as against many honorable persons.

Since you have opened the columns of your journal for the attack, I trust that your impartiality will not close them to the defence.

As insults prove nothing, I will carefully abstain from them, and will avoid using such a mode of retaliation, which would be unworthy of me.

I will just give a short and true statement of facts that have been intentionally suppressed, or represented in a false light in your paper, and particularly by the *Tribune*, of Detroit, partly quoted in that article, and reproduced entirely by the *Pilot* of the 20th instant, and the other city journals.

It is about three months ago, that, of her own inclination, and without having been invited either directly or indirectly by the gentlemen of the Seminary, a Miss Starr, then 21 years of age, all but a few days, asked to speak to one of them. This ecclesiastic having presented himself in the parlour, she told him her name, and immediately explained to him the object of her visit.

She wished to become a Catholic, and to embrace the religious profession. This double resolution was deeply fixed in her mind for many years. It was not by the influence of priests that she adopted it; it had sprung up suddenly and of itself. Since that period her will had never changed a single moment. About that time she had caused herself to be baptised in the Catholic Church in England; but the opposition of her parents had prevented her from making public profession of her faith. Nay, more, sometime after she was compelled to act openly as if she were a Protestant. She suffered a great deal in this leading a life contrary to her convictions, and she anxiously awaited the day of her majority, firmly resolved to accomplish her two-fold project. He, whom you call "her secret spiritual adviser," told her that since she was so well convinced, and for so long a time, of the truth of the Catholic religion, it was not lawful for her to perform any act of Protestantism, and that she should ask her parents for permission to profess the religion which she believed to be the only true one.

To this remark Miss Starr immediately replied, that such a thing was absolutely impossible; that she would encounter in her family an insurmountable opposition, and that by making known her intention of embracing the Catholic faith, she would deprive herself forever of the means of doing so; that there was no other chance of success but in flight, and that she was determined to leave her father's house and retire into a convent as soon as she should be of age.

Whereupon "the spiritual adviser," remembering that our Lord had said that "He who loves his father or his mother more than Him, is not worthy of Him; that if the right hand or the right foot should scandalize us, we must cut them off and cast them from us;" and that a hundred fold is promised, even in this life, to him who shall leave, for the love of God, his father, his mother, his brothers and sisters, and all that he possesses, did not hesitate in approving her intention to employ the only means, as she declared, that was left to her of professing the faith which she believed to be the only true faith, and which is so in reality,—but he did not suggest that means, she herself had previously determined on it.

With regard to embracing the religious state, "the spiritual adviser" was in no hurry to decide.—He objected to Miss Starr that the discipline in religious communities is severe, and that particularly that of the one to which she felt most strongly inclined—the order of Carmelites. But the young lady replied with so much good sense, firmness, generosity and cool determination, that the priest, admiring the excellent disposition of her who consulted him, thought it his duty to insist no longer. He consented thereupon that she should leave her father's house, where she could not work out her salvation, being forced to perform exteriorly acts which were contrary to her conscience; and the said priest acknowledged freely and openly that he did assist in the execution of a project which he believed, and which really was, on the state of things described by Miss Starr,—strictly obligatory on her. She earnestly requested, and he promised, that the secret should be kept in regard to the temporary asylum which she might select.

This secret having been asked for the excellent reasons which the reader will easily discover in the preceding statement, the said priest believed, and he was perfectly right in so believing, that he was obliged to keep it under pain of mortal sin. It is for that reason, when his Lordship the Bishop of Montreal desired the priests of the Seminary to inform him of whatever they knew concerning the retreat of Miss Starr, her "spiritual adviser," (who by the way, was never directly interrogated,) remained silent; and he would have done so with no less fidelity, even if an authority, far beyond that of the Bishop, had commanded him, in consequence of false information, to reveal what he knew.

Whence you see, Mr. Editor, (we may remark in passing,) that the priest in promising obedience to his ecclesiastical superior, does not, *force*, as has so often been falsely asserted amongst Protestants, that there is above all human law, a law which never can be violated without crime. The priest, who is at present attacked with so much fury, has observed that law; and he glories in having done so. He looks upon it as an honour to-day, and he will do so equally to-morrow; and always, to follow the line of conduct with which the Protestant press has reproached him, with so little reticence and so much injustice. His rule of action as well as of belief is not the wind of opinion, but the immutable principles of reason and faith.

I shall continue my relation in another number; and I have the honour to inform you, that I have in my possession many proofs, real as well as written, of everything that I advance. I shall not fail to produce them in case of need.

I have the honor to remain,

Mr. Editor,

Your humble servant,

A FRIEND OF TRUTH.

Montreal, July 29, 1859.

2ND LETTER.

Sir.—I promised in my former letter to continue the account of the departure of Miss Starr; I now hasten to fulfil my promise.

Miss Starr being satisfied that the priest, "her spiritual adviser," whom she had seen three or four times, would faithfully preserve the secret of her intended retreat, on the 28th of May last left the parlour of the Seminary and went on foot to the Grey Nunnery, sending her travelling bag before her. In the nunnery she had become acquainted with one of the nuns, to whom she made known all her projects. The Nun, who had opposed, but in vain, objections stronger even than those of her spiritual adviser, invited her to breakfast. Some time after, Miss Starr started for the depot of the Grand Trunk, at Point St. Charles, and took the cars for Toronto. I close my relation here, as I have no longer the same certainty as to what took place subsequently. Those who are interested in the sequel of the affair may finish the narrative if they judge fit. I will only add,—1st. That during her entire stay at Toledo, in the Orphan's Asylum, Miss Starr was perfectly free—we have it in her own handwriting. 2nd. That Miss Starr, being informed of what occurred on the receipt of her first letter by her parents, implicitly sanctioned the resolution of not showing them the second.

I will now, as I promised, draw from the facts which I have exposed, and which can be proved with certainty if it be necessary, the conclusions which naturally follow from them.